

## CONSUMERS CURING CANCER?

Company-cause fit and celebrity endorsements affecting skepticism towards cause-related marketing campaigns supporting cancer research

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impacts of company-cause fit and endorsement-cause fit on consumers' attitudes towards cause-related marketing campaigns. In order to examine the role of company-cause fit in cause-related marketing, the study paired the cause of supporting cancer research with two hypothetical companies representing car manufacturing and organic food industry.

The research was conducted through an online survey completed by 245 Finnish university students. In the survey, the participants were asked to rate likert-scale items based on their attitudes towards the cause, the company and its campaign and the perceived fit between the cause and the company. The survey involved six different manipulations concerning the company-cause fit and endorsement-cause fit of the campaign.

The hypotheses of the study were tested using a two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Supporting the hypotheses of the study, the results show that company-cause fit has a significant impact on skepticism towards the campaign. Furthermore, consumers' level of skepticism is lower when the fit between the cause and the company is high. In addition, the results of the study also suggest that a high company-cause fit improves the consumers' perceptions of the company image.

According to the findings, a high endorsement-cause fit results in lower levels of skepticism and a better company image when the company-cause fit is high. However, when the fit between the company and the cause is low, a low endorsement-cause fit performs better in terms of consumer attitudes and company image. Nevertheless, these differences between the manipulations of endorsement-cause fit were not significant which resulted in rejecting the hypotheses concerning celebrity endorsements.

The findings of the study indicate that in order to improve consumers' attitudes towards cause-related marketing and enhance the company image, managers need to choose a cause which aligns well with the company values. In addition, although the influence of celebrity endorsements and endorsement-cause fit was not found significant in this study, the trend suggests that the positive influence of a high company-cause fit can be optimized with a celebrity endorsement that has a genuine connection with the cause.

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**Keywords** cause-related marketing, consumer attitudes

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### **Tiivistelmä**

Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli arvioida hyväntekeväisyyskohteen ja yrityksen sekä näitä mainostavan julkisuudenhenkilön yhteensopivuuden vaikutuksia kuluttajien mielipiteisiin koskien hyväntekeväisyyteen pohjautuvaa markkinointia. Yhteensopivuuden roolin tarkastelemista varten tutkimusasetelmassa yhdistettiin syöpätutkimuksen tukeminen sekä kaksi hypoteettista yritystä, joista toinen oli autonvalmistaja ja toinen tuotti terveellistä luomuruokaa.

Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin verkkokyselyllä, johon vastasi 245 suomalaista yliopisto-opiskelijaa. Vastaajat arvioivat väitteitä likert-asteikolla koskien asenteitaan hyväntekeväisyyskohdetta, yritystä ja kampanjaa kohtaan sekä kokemustaan yrityksen ja hyväntekeväisyyskohteen yhteensopivuudesta. Kyselyyn sisältyi kuusi erilaista yrityksen, hyväntekeväisyyskohteen sekä näitä mainostavan julkisuudenhenkilön yhteensopivuuden manipulaatiota.

Tutkimuksen hypoteesit testattiin kaksisuuntaisella kovarianssianalyysillä (ANCOVA). Tulosten mukaan yrityksen ja hyväntekeväisyyskohteen yhteensopivuudella on hypoteesien mukaisesti merkittävä vaikutus kuluttajien skeptisyyteen koskien kampanjaa. Kuluttajat ovat vähemmän skeptisiä, kun yrityksen ja hyväntekeväisyyskohteen yhteensopivuus on korkea. Tulosten mukaan korkea yhteensopivuus vaikuttaa positiivisesti myös yrityksen julkisuuskuvaan.

Löydösten mukaan korkea hyväntekeväisyyskohteen ja sitä mainostavan julkisuudenhenkilön yhteensopivuus vähentää kuluttajien skeptisyyttä ja parantaa yrityksen julkisuuskuvaa tilanteessa, jossa myös hyväntekeväisyyskohteen ja yrityksen yhteensopivuus on korkea. Matala hyväntekeväisyyskohteen ja julkisuudenhenkilön yhteensopivuus johtaa kuitenkin parempiin tuloksiin, kun yhteensopivuus yrityksen ja hyväntekeväisyyskohteen välillä on myöskin alhainen. Erot manipulaatioiden välillä eivät kuitenkaan olleet tilastollisesti merkittäviä, mikä johti julkisuudenhenkilöä koskevien hypoteesien hylkäämiseen.

Tutkimuksen löydökset osoittavat, että parantaakseen kuluttajien asenteita hyväntekeväisyyteen pohjautuvaa markkinointia kohtaan markkinointijohtajien on valittava kampanjaan hyväntekeväisyyskohde, joka sopii hyvin yhteen yrityksen arvojen kanssa. Vaikka julkisuudenhenkilöiden vaikutus kampanjaan ei ollutkaan tutkimuksen mukaan tilastollisesti merkittävä, voidaan sen pohjalta tehdä suuntaa antava päätelmä, jonka mukaan yrityksen ja hyväntekeväisyyskohteen yhteensopivuuden positiivinen vaikutus voidaan optimoida yhteensopivalla julkisuudenhenkilöllä.

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**Keywords** hyväntekeväisyyteen pohjautuva markkinointi, kuluttajien asenteet

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## **1. Introduction**

In the increasingly competitive business environment, companies are facing new challenges concerning their performance. Company managers need to find more creative ways to differentiate their products and services from their competitors. Meanwhile, modern consumers are becoming more socially and environmentally aware and expect companies to address the ongoing issues. Therefore, quality products and competitive prices are simply not enough. Thus, pressured by consumers and increasing competition, companies engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategies to demonstrate that the company takes interest in more than just its financial success.

Corporate social responsibility has become a crucial tool for company managers aiming at improving the corporate image by taking an active role in the welfare of the society. Furthermore, corporate social responsibility is a concept based on the interdependence of companies and the society and the environment. (Gholami, 2011.) In addition to the improvement of the company image and reputation, CSR is also essential for sustainable operations of companies and corporate risk reduction (Gholami, 2011; Jo & Na, 2012). Furthermore, a positive market presence may also have beneficial impacts on the financial performance of the company (Fioravante, 2010).

### **1.1. Approaches to corporate social responsibility**

Corporate social responsibility can be approached as value creation, risk management or philanthropy. The purpose of the value creation approach is to create a sustainable business model in order to drive social development. This approach involves companies enhancing their operations by reducing costs and increasing energy efficiency in order to create value for the stakeholders and improve the corporate image and reputation. Successful CSR strategies may also create value by increasing the loyalty of consumers and employees. (Gholami, 2011)

Another approach to corporate social responsibility is risk management. Risk management is important because even small fluctuations in the consumer demand may have detrimental impact on the company's stock price. However, a successful CSR strategy may lead to lower

levels of firm risk even at controversial industries such as alcohol and tobacco (Jo & Na, 2012). Furthermore, the reduced risk is caused by the improved corporate image and transparency due to an effective CSR strategy.

Lastly, companies engage in philanthropy in order to communicate their corporate ethical and moral values. Through strategic charitable giving, companies may gain from the “economic approach of altruism”. Furthermore, philanthropy allows companies to differentiate themselves from the competitors and communicate the moral values of the company. Consumers recognize the corporate philanthropic initiatives and are more likely identify with the values communicated by the companies. (Fioravante, 2010)

In the emergence of corporate social responsibility and philanthropy, cause-related marketing has become a common marketing tool for companies who aim at communicating their corporate social responsibility to the consumers and differentiate their brand from the competitors (Langen et al. 2013). The next subchapter will introduce the concept of cause-related marketing and the current issues revolving around the phenomenon.

## **1.2. Cause-related marketing**

In the past decade, cause-based or cause-related marketing has been one of the fastest growing forms of CSR strategies. Varadarajan & Menon (1988) define cause-related marketing as “the process of formulating and implementing marketing activities that are characterized by an offer from the firm to contribute a specific amount to a designated cause when customers engage in revenue providing exchanges that satisfy organizational and individual objectives” (p. 60). Furthermore, a typical cause-related marketing campaign involves a promotional offer in which the company donates a specific amount to a designated cause. Companies may choose to support for example social, environmental and health causes in their cause-related marketing campaigns in order to connect with the customers sharing similar values.

Cause-related marketing strategies have the potential to benefit the company, the cause and the consumers (Howie et al. 2018). Furthermore, companies often use cause-related marketing in order to improve their sales and profits, enhance the corporate image and differentiate their products from their competitors. In addition, cause-related marketing



allows the companies to communicate their values and responsibility toward ethical, environmental and social issues (Langen et al. 2013.).

In addition to increased fundraising, non-profit organizations benefit from the exposure and cause awareness that the gain from cause-related marketing. However, one of the challenges of cause-related marketing is that companies and non-profit organizations (NPOs) often have different objectives and goals regarding the campaign which may lead to differing opinions about the most suitable implementation strategies (Liu & Ko, 2011). An unsuccessful implementation of a cause-related marketing campaign may have negative impacts on the corporate image if the companies fail to communicate their actual contributions to the cause (Hyllegard et al. 2010). Similarly, a poorly implemented campaign may damage the credibility of the NPO if the consumers perceive that the organization is compromising its core values at the expense of financial gain (Lingen, 2008).

In addition to fulfilling their wants and needs, consumption offers consumers a way to express their identities. By participating in cause-related marketing campaigns, consumers may express themselves as moral individuals. Furthermore, consumers form a self-schema around their perceptions of their own moral identity. Companies may leverage these consumers' moral identities by creating cause-related marketing campaigns with moral-related stimuli. (He et al. 2016)

In addition to the ability to express one's moral identity, consumers have various different motivations for engaging in prosocial behavior and participating in cause-related campaigns. For example, status-seeking consumers participate in cause-related marketing campaigns in order to enhance their personal status and social image rather than from the desire to help the cause (Choi & Seo, 2017). Cause-related marketing may also cause emotional arousal in consumers which positively influences their intentions to participate. (Guerreiro et al. 2015)

There are multiple factors that have an impact on the effectiveness of cause-related marketing campaigns. The consumer responses to cause-related marketing may vary depending on both campaign- and consumer-related attributes such as donation size, sociodemographic factors and psychological traits (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010; Langen et al. 2013; Chang & Cheng, 2014). Furthermore, one of the most discussed factors is the perceived fit between the company and the cause it is supporting through the campaign (Chang & Liu, 2012). A high company-cause fit has a positive influence on the

successfulness of cause-related marketing and the consumers' attitudes towards the campaigns (Chang & Liu, 2012; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004; Elving, 2013). However, prior literature shows also contradicting results (Moosmayer & Fuljahn 2013; Lafferty, 2007).

The success of the campaign may also depend on the marketing environment. Furthermore, in the highly saturated markets where cause-related marketing is common, it is increasingly difficult for companies to stand out with their campaigns (La Ferle et al. 2013). A common way for improving campaign awareness is to use celebrity endorsements. By using celebrities, companies and NPOs aim at increasing the campaign awareness (Branigan & Mitsis, 2014). However, depending on the reputation of the celebrity endorsements may also have detrimental impacts on both the company and the NPO behind the cause (Thamaraiselvan et al. 2017). Therefore, the implementation of celebrity endorsements requires careful consideration from the marketing management.

Because of the ambiguous nature of campaigns and their main objectives, cause-related marketing may also arise contradicting feelings among consumers; some consumers might think that it shows that the company has care for the greater good, but some might also feel that the companies' motivations in such campaigns are mainly to increase the profits of the company and attract new customer segments (Langen et al. 2013). Thus, overcoming skepticism is a significant challenge for cause-related marketing (Bae, 2018). In addition to skeptical attitudes, consumers may also use defensive denial in order to rationalize their non-participation in cause-related marketing campaigns (Howie et al. 2018).

### **1.3. Cause-related marketing and cancer research**

Although social and environmental causes are generally best represented in cause-related marketing, also health causes are becoming more common. Because of the growing number of severe health issues such as obesity and cancer, modern consumers are more aware of health concerns and threats. Meanwhile, companies such as Kraft and Kentucky Fried Chicken have started co-operating with NPOs supporting health causes. However, when health-related causes are paired with products that are detrimental for one's health, the consumers may perceive these foods healthier than they are (Minton & Cornwell, 2016.).

One of the most prominent elements of cause-related marketing supporting cancer research is the pink ribbon which is the international symbol for breast cancer awareness. The symbol is particularly visible in October which is the international breast cancer awareness month. In Finland, the Pink Ribbon campaign (Roosa nauha) is arranged by the Cancer Foundation Finland (Syöpäsäätiö). The Pink Ribbon campaign involves co-operation with multiple companies and collects funds for cancer research and cancer specialist counselling in Finland. (Syöpäsäätiö, 2019)

#### **1.4. Research questions**

In order to limit the research scope on cause-related marketing, this thesis focuses on cause-related marketing campaigns supporting cancer research in Finnish automobile industries and their impacts on consumers' skepticism towards such campaigns.

The main objective of the thesis is to study the impacts of company-cause fit and endorsement-cause fit on the consumers' attitudes and skepticism toward cause-related marketing. In order to research the phenomenon, the following research questions were formed.

- 1. How can companies benefit from cause-related marketing?*
- 2. What is the impact of company-cause fit on consumers' attitudes and skepticism towards cause-related marketing?*
- 3. Does using a celebrity endorser have an impact on the attitudes and skepticism towards cause-related marketing?*
- 4. How does the fit between the celebrity endorser and the cause influence the attitudes and skepticism toward cause-related marketing?*
- 5. How can companies reduce skepticism toward cause-related marketing campaigns?*

### **1.5. Structure of the thesis**

The structure of the thesis is as follows. The introduction is followed by literature review in Chapter 2. The literature review will cover topics related to cause-related marketing such as company-cause fit and the use of campaign endorsements. Based on the literature review, a theoretical framework and the hypotheses for the study will be formed.

In Chapter 3, the research setting and the data collection methods will be introduced. In addition, the trustworthiness of the study will be discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will discuss the data analysis and present the results of study.

In Chapter 5, the results will be discussed in more detail and reflected with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Managerial implications of the findings will also be discussed in Chapter 5. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the study with final conclusions and remarks concerning the research questions as well as the limitations and suggestions for further research.

## **2. Literature review**

Because of the ambivalent nature of the topic, the impact of cause-related marketing has been widely discussed in marketing research. Researchers have been interested in explaining how cause-related marketing affects the corporate images of the companies and the attitudes and purchase decisions of consumers.

In this literature review I will assess the prior research done in the field of cause-based marketing. In order to review articles discussing various topic around the phenomenon of cause-based marketing, a search was conducted using Aalto University Finna online library. Keywords cause-based marketing and cause-related marketing were first used in order to have an overall picture of the coverage of the topic in existing literature and articles were chosen from various topics around the phenomenon.

### **2.1. Motivations and implementation strategies for cause-related marketing**

Companies are motivated to use cause-related marketing strategies in order to boost their sales and improve their overall corporate image. Meanwhile, non-profit organizations (NPOs) and charities gain valuable visibility from campaigns with the for-profit companies. Furthermore, studies have shown that cause-related marketing strategies benefit both the companies and the NPOs. However, both parties often have different motivations, preferences and priorities when selecting potential partners and implementation strategies for cause-related marketing. (Liu & Ko, 2011.)

Liu & Ko (2011) studied how companies and NPOs seek for partners for their cause-related marketing strategies. The authors conducted semi-structured interviews with managers of UK-based companies and NPOs and reviewed their attitudes towards four different implementation strategies of cause-related marketing; sponsorship, transaction-based, joint-promotion and donation in-kind.

According to Liu & Ko (2011), NPOs are generally seeking fundraising potential and companies aim at improving their social image and improving their return on investment. Furthermore, the company managers saw sponsorship as a way of communicating the company's ethical brand image to a specific group of people. Therefore, when selecting the

cause, company managers concentrate on evaluating how interested their target customers would be in the cause i.e. assessing the fit between the cause and the company or its brands and products.

Meanwhile, NPOs believe that sponsorship from well-known companies could improve the number of attendees at charity events. Although these kinds of charity events are not the most efficient way of collecting donations, they are a great way for the NPOs to increase the awareness for their cause and recruit donors and volunteers for the future. (Liu & Ko, 2011.)

Transaction-based campaigns provide income for the NPOs from every product sold. Although NPO managers believe that these kinds of campaigns are a good way of raising donations, as fundraising activities they are quite small and unreliable. However, companies prefer implementing transaction-based campaigns when their main goal is to increase profits and find new customers. (Liu & Ko, 2011.)

The joint-promotion implementation strategy involves cooperative advertising efforts from both the company and the NPO. When choosing a partner for joint-promotions, companies are mainly interested in the ethical image of the NPO, the restrictions that cooperating with the NPO might cause and the brand-cause fit. However, NPOs often feel that joint-promotions are difficult to be controlled and therefore they often pose restrictions on how the company can use their name and logo in their promotions in response to higher donations for the NPO and its cause. (Liu & Ko, 2011.)

Donation in-kind is a non-financial contribution from the company towards an NPO like employee volunteers given in return to the right of using the name and the logo of the NPO. This way the NPOs gain both manpower and skills from the volunteering employees. According to Liu & Ko (2011) both parties seem to be less concerned about having control in this implementation form, mainly because there is no money involved. For the companies this provides more intangible gain rather than monetary profit; the company is able to improve its internal and external corporate reputation as well as the level of motivation and personal fulfillment of the employees. (Liu & Ko, 2011.)

Thus, the different motivations and priorities discussed above may lead to contrasts of interest between companies and NPO taking part in cause-related marketing activities. Therefore, it is important to find a strategy that leads to the best overall benefit for the

company's profitability and the social cause of the NPO. Furthermore, a successful implementation of a cause-related marketing strategy may lead to a greater brand awareness for both parties, aid in the fundraising process of the NPOs cause and improve the image of the company and the brand loyalty of the companies' customers.

Drumwright (1996) assessed advertising and campaigns with a social agenda and investigated the company managers' objectives for such campaigns. Most campaigns with social dimensions have mixed objectives, both economic and social. Furthermore, Drumwright (1996) also underlines that whatever is the initial objective for social advertising or campaign, it may still have positive social effects.

According to Drumwright (1996), social campaigns are not particularly effective in reaching companies' traditional objectives such as increasing sales and profit, but they help with company-oriented objectives such as communicating the company mission and motivating the employees. This may be explained with the theory of organizational identification. The employees define themselves through the same attributes that they believe define the organization. When the cause-company compatibility is high, the employees may find it easier to identify with the organization and its values. Furthermore, higher degree of organizational identification leads to higher job satisfaction, commitment, and motivation. (Drumwright, 1996.)

Thus, the company-cause fit is an important success factor to be assessed. In order to improve the image of the brand, companies should also pay attention on the fit of the cause and the consumers' social identity, especially with hedonic products with many competing brands (Guerreiro et al. 2015).

## **2.2. Factors impacting cause-related marketing**

There are multiple factors that may influence the effectiveness of cause-related marketing. These factors include both campaign-related and consumer-related issues that have been discussed in prior literature. Furthermore, the effectiveness of cause-related may be influenced for example by consumers' identification with the cause (Vanhamme et al. 2012), donation size (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010), psychological traits (Chang & Cheng, 2014; He et al. 2016; Tangari et al. 2010), feelings of guilt (Choi and Seo, 2017), skepticism and

company credibility (Bae, 2018), consumer demographics and consumption habits (Langen et al. 2013), novelty of the cause-related marketing strategy, company motives and the different political and economic advertising environments (La Ferle et al. 2013). The following subchapters will discuss these factors in more detail.

### **2.2.1. Campaign-related factors impacting cause-related marketing**

As discussed by Liu & Ko (2011), the main motivation for companies using cause-related marketing strategies is often improving the corporate image. To further address this issue, Vanhamme et al. (2012) studied the influence of consumers' identification with the cause on corporate image based on three core cause attributes: cause type, cause scope and cause acuteness. The consumer-cause identification on these three cause attributes leads to more positive corporate image evaluations.

Cause type is based on whether the cause supports primary or secondary needs (Vanhamme et al. 2012). Consumers identify better and give more positive evaluations for cause-related marketing campaigns supporting primary needs. Thus the research suggests that marketers who want to improve their corporate image should concentrate creating campaigns supporting a primary need such.

Cause scope refers to the geographic scope of the cause i.e. whether the focus of the cause is local, national or international (Vanhamme et al. 2012). Consumers tend to identify more with local or national causes compared to international causes. However, consumers also give more positive evaluations for corporate images due to cause-related marketing strategies with international causes. In addition, international causes receive relatively more attention and media coverage. (Vanhamme et al. 2012.)

Cause acuteness refers to whether the cause is supporting sudden disasters such as a tsunami or ongoing, persistent tragedies such as poverty or chronic illnesses in third world countries (Vanhamme et al. 2012). Consumers find it slightly easier to identify with causes that occur suddenly, possibly due to their massive coverage on media. However, compared to the other two cause attributes, the difference with cause acuteness is only marginal. (Vanhamme et al. 2012.)



Consumers may have different responses for cause-related marketing campaigns depending on their local market environment. La Ferle et al. (2013) studied factors influencing attitudes toward cause-related marketing in different market environments. The novelty of cause-related marketing campaigns drives positive attitudes towards them. Thus marketers gain most out of cause-related marketing campaigns when the strategy is “in its honeymoon stage” in the market (La Ferle et al. 2013). Furthermore, when cause-related marketing strategies become more common, it makes it more difficult for an individual campaign to stand out. The consumers become more familiar with cause-related marketing campaigns which may also cause diminishing marginal returns as the campaigns become less effective. In addition, consumers also have more positive attitudes towards cause-related marketing campaigns when the company motives are perceived as being altruistic (La Ferle et al. 2013).

La Ferle et al. (2013) compared their survey results from American and Indian university students. Based on the results, Indian consumers have more positive attitudes towards cause-related marketing overall than their American counterparts. The authors also discussed how different advertising environments may influence the differences in the consumer attitudes and responses (La Ferle et al. 2013). Furthermore, the study showed that the origin of the company engaging in cause-related marketing activities matters more for Indian consumers, having more positive attitudes towards national than multinational companies. This could be explained with the assumption that consumers in collectivistic countries such as India may feel greater obligation towards individuals in need in their own society than consumers in more individualistic countries such as the United States. Thus, Indian consumers would have more positive attitudes towards cause-related marketing strategies that are developed by local companies and supporting local causes. (La Ferle et al. 2013.)

Moosmayer & Fuljahn (2010) discuss the impacts of donation size on cause-related marketing. The donation size has an influence on the consumers’ perceptions of the fairness of cause-related marketing campaigns and their benefit for NPOs; larger donation sizes were perceived as being more beneficial for the non-profits associated with the campaign. There are also gender differences in the impact of donation size; donation size is more relevant to women in terms of consumer product attitudes and perceptions. (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010.)

### **2.2.2. Consumer traits and characteristics impacting cause-related marketing**

Cause-related marketing is also closely tied with the concepts of moral and values. He et al. (2016) discussed the impact of consumer moral identity on cause-related marketing. Moral identity is defined as the self-schema around moral values, goals, traits and behavioral scripts i.e. whether people see themselves as moral individuals (He et al. 2016). Furthermore, moral identity centrality refers to the extent to which the moral identity is central to the self-concept of an individual. According to He et al. (2016), moral identity centrality positively affects the purchase motivation and intentions concerning cause-related marketing products. Therefore, cause-related marketing is less effective for consumers with lower moral identities. Moreover, the purchase motivation may be strengthened by positive brand social responsibility images or subjective emotional factors such as brand attachment. (He et al. 2016.)

Tangari et al. (2010) discussed how consumers' temporal orientation and the temporal framing of societal needs in cause-related marketing campaigns impact consumer perceptions. According to Tangari et al. (2010) consumers' temporal orientation moderates the impact of the temporal framing of the cause-related marketing campaign i.e. whether the cause was supporting immediate needs or long-term social issues. Furthermore, consumers with present orientations have more positive perceptions when the corporate response is in proximal terms i.e. supporting causes that require immediate actions rather than distal, long-term actions.

In contrast, consumers with future orientation do not show significant differences in the perceptions regarding different framings. However, the future oriented consumers have more positive perceptions of campaigns with distal framings than their present oriented counterparts whereas proximal framings had similar impacts on both present and future oriented consumers. Thus, consumers with present orientations are more likely to be influenced by the temporal framing in favor of immediate actions. (Tangari et al. 2010.) However, it has also been discussed that long-term causes may increase the perception of company commitment in the cause thus improving its image (Drumwright, 1996).

Choi & Seo (2017) studied the impact of guilt, status motive and recognition on consumers' prosocial behavior and intentions of participating cause-related marketing promotions on

social media. Status-seeking consumers are more likely to participate in cause-related marketing promotions publicly on social media than privately in order to maintain and enhance their social image. In addition, feelings of guilt had a positive influence on the intentions of participating cause-related marketing promotions when the participation is publicly recognized. However, the feeling of guilt alone does not have significant impacts on the intention to participate. (Choi & Seo, 2017.)

Although the purpose of cause-related marketing strategies is usually improving the image of the company, consumers may also be skeptical about businesses using cause-related marketing for manipulating their customers in order to increase the company's profit. Differences in consumer attitudes towards cause-related marketing may also be influenced by psychological traits. Chang & Cheng (2014) studied the effect of different shopping orientations, mindsets and gender differences in the responses to cause-related marketing. The researchers concentrated on evaluating the effects four different psychological traits; hedonism, collectivism, utilitarianism and individualism.

According to the findings of the study, hedonistic shopping orientation and collectivistic mindset were found to reduce skepticism towards cause-related marketing and advertising. On the other hand, utilitarianism and an individualistic mindset may facilitate consumer skepticism toward advertising. Furthermore, skepticism toward advertising has a negative effect on consumer purchase intentions. (Chang & Cheng, 2014.)

Because of the differing levels of skepticism among consumers it could be useful for marketers to analyze their target market's mindset and psychological traits in order to create cause-related marketing campaigns that appeal to the right audience and to reduce skeptical attitudes. Bae (2018) discussed overcoming skepticism towards cause-related marketing. Skepticism influences the state of diminishing corporate credibility perceived by the consumers. In order to reduce skepticism, firms need to be able to acknowledge and manage both their firm-serving and public serving motivations for cause-related marketing strategies. Skeptical consumers are aware that companies have other motivations besides the public-serving ones that are usually communicated clearly. Therefore, transparency on publicly stating the firm-serving benefits of the company may improve consumers' perceptions of the company and its credibility. Furthermore, Bae (2018) also states that the

perceived company credibility has also a great influence on the consumers' intentions of following the brand online.

### **2.2.3. Sociodemographic and cultural factors impacting cause-related marketing**

In addition to personal characteristics and campaign-related factors, different cultures have various characteristics that have an impact on consumer behavior (Becker-Olsen et al. 2011; Kim & Johnson, 2013). Also other sociodemographic factors such as age, gender, education, income, consumption habits and number of children may impact the effectiveness of cause-related marketing strategies (Langen et al. 2013; Guerreiro, 2015).

Langen et al. (2013) evaluated the success factors of cause-related marketing in Germany and identified four different groups of consumers who have differing attitudes towards cause-related marketing; lovers, critics, replacers and "label less important".

According to Langen et al. (2013), the lovers segment has the highest average age of the four clusters. If the members of the lovers segment are convinced to switch to a brand due to cause-related marketing, they are not likely to switch back i.e. they were more likely to become loyal for the brand due to cause-related marketing. The second segment, critics, was found being most skeptical; the members of the segment question the motivations behind the companies doing cause-related marketing. This segment is the also youngest of the four and has the highest level of educational background. In addition, the members of the segment tend to seek information more than other segments before making purchase decision. Thus, young and educated consumers are more concerned about the true motivations behind such campaigns. (Langen et al. 2013.)

The replacers segment did not show strong feelings towards cause-related marketing campaigns and saw them merely as replacers for other ethical products and activities such as FairTrade or donating straight to a charity or a cause (Langen et al. 2013). This segment could benefit the profit-seeking companies but could be unfavorable for NPOs if the members of the segment switch from donating to a charity to a cause-related marketing product.

The members of the “label less important” segment were less likely to be loyal towards a brand and showed more price and benefit sensitivity when making purchase decisions. Because cause-related marketing products are often sold at a premium price, the price sensitive consumers might not be the best target segment for such products. However, the members of segment were also most likely to make conscious cause-related marketing purchase decisions i.e. they bought such products only when they found the cause being important for them. (Langen et al. 2013.)

As supported by the findings of Langen et al. 2013, the effectiveness of cause-related marketing may be influenced by sociodemographic factors. In addition, cause-related marketing effectiveness on hedonic products also increases as the stability of the consumers’ income increases. On the other hand, the effectiveness of the cause-related marketing strategies diminishes as the number of the children in the household increases. (Guerreiro et al. 2015.)

According to Chang and Cheng (2014), gender is also an important variable determining the attitudes towards cause-related marketing. This may be because gender has been found to have a relationship with the psychological traits such as hedonism and collectivism affecting consumer skepticism; females are usually more altruistic and collectivistic than their male counterparts. However, the study did not show gender differences in the utilitarianism and its influence of consumer skepticism. (Chang & Cheng, 2014.)

Also Moosmayer & Fuljahn (2010) suggest that women tend to perceive cause-related marketing campaigns more positively in terms of firm behavior, attitudes toward the product and consumer goodwill. These gender differences may be explained with different feelings of empathy between men and women. However, gender has no significant impact on the consumers’ perceptions of benefit for the NPOs (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2010).

Becker-Olsen et al. (2011) studied the differences of consumer perceptions of firms implementing corporate social responsibility strategies in American and Mexican cultures. They focused on finding out whether global CSR strategies are more effective in building positive perceptions than localized CSR programs.

According to their findings, the American and Mexican consumers show some differences in the perceptions of CSR. The American consumers expected firms to involve in CSR

activities slightly more than their Mexican counterparts whereas Mexican valued these efforts more. However, both cultures experienced improvements in the brand attitudes and purchase intentions once being disclosed with the companies' involvement with CRS. In addition, the global CSR strategies were found to be more effective than localized programs for both the American and the Mexican consumers. (Becker-Olsen et al. 2011.)

Kim & Johnson (2013) conducted a cross-cultural examination of the impact of moral emotions to the attitudes towards cause-related marketing among American and Korean undergraduate students. The researchers identified two different moral emotions affecting purchase intentions of consumers; ego-focused such as pride and anger and other-focused such as guilt and empathy. According to their findings, both forms of moral emotions affected the purchase intentions of a fashion product supporting a social cause for both of the groups of students.

However, cultural differences were found concerning individualistic and collectivistic dimensions. The American culture is individualistic which means that the ties between individuals are loose and everyone is expected to look after themselves and their immediate family. Korea, on the other hand, is a collectivistic culture and the individuals are integrated into tight communities right after their birth. These communities protect them in exchange for loyalty towards other members of the community. (Kim & Johnson, 2013.)

People from individualistic cultures tend to feel more ego-focused emotions whereas collectivistic cultures feel more other-focused emotions. Furthermore, the purchase intentions of US students were significantly more affected by ego-focused emotions than the Korean students who were more affected by other-focused emotions. (Kim & Johnson, 2013.)

Thus, companies must pay attention to the cultural dimensions of the target market when planning cause-related marketing campaigns. When targeting Western cultures, the marketing managers should concentrate on designing advertising messages that emphasize pride where as more collectivistic cultures are to be persuaded by appealing to emotions like guilt and the responsibility to help the bigger community.

### **2.3. Consumer responses to cause-related marketing**

Consumers' purchase decisions may be influenced by uncontrolled physiological responses to cause-related marketing campaigns. According to Guerreiro et al. (2015), emotional arousal, pleasure and visual attention towards cause-related marketing strategies are likely to lead into altruistic behavior with hedonic product purchases. However, when the purchase is utilitarian and the consumer has an actual functional need to be fulfilled, consumers tend to concentrate more on the brand and the donation amount rather than emotional aspects of the social cause in question.

Howie et al. (2018) studied negative responses towards cause-related marketing when the participation requires personal involvement, time and effort from the consumers. Consumers review their personal costs and benefits for participating and they may try to rationalize their nonparticipation with defensive denial and neutralization strategies. These strategies involve redefining the situation and devaluing the importance of their participation in order to avoid prosocial behavior without the feeling of guilt. However, in order to avoid defensive denial, companies can alleviate the costs by presenting the effort demands in more appealing ways such as giving the opportunity to choose the cause to be supported. (Howie et al. 2018.)

### **2.4. Long term impacts of cause-related marketing**

One of the most common objectives of for-profit companies is to create loyal customers. Furthermore, companies aim at increasing the brand loyalty of their customers because it allows them to charge premium prices and increase their market share. Loyal customers also tend to increase their spending over time and they are a source for positive word-of-mouth which may improve the brand's image as well as the brand awareness among the companies' potential customers. (van den Brink et al. 2006.) According to prior research, brand loyalty in cause-related marketing campaigns is influenced by different factors including the level of product involvement (van den Brink et al. 2006), customers' initial attitudes, post-purchase satisfaction and company credibility and commitment to the cause (Galan-Ladero et al. 2013). In addition, cause-related marketing campaigns are more effective when used consistently over time (Till & Nowak, 2000).

The effect of strategic and tactical cause-related marketing on consumers' brand loyalty on low and high involvement products were discussed by van den Brink et al. (2006). For their research, van den Brink et al. (2006) distinguished between strategic and tactical cause-related marketing. Strategic cause-related marketing strategies refer to cause-related marketing campaigns that involve the senior management of the company, a substantial amount of invested resources and a long-term commitment to the cause in question. In contrast, tactical cause-related marketing strategies last for a shorter period of time and require less involvement from the company's employees. (van den Brink et al. 2006.)

Consumers perceived a higher level of loyalty when the firm had a long-term commitment with the cause and the product is low involvement. However, such impact was not visible in the tactical short-term campaigns with low or high involvement products. (van den Brink et al. 2006). This suggests that in order to create more brand loyalty, the companies should concentrate on long-term cause-related marketing instead of short-term campaigns in order to improve brand loyalty among their consumers.

The initial attitudes towards cause-related marketing may influence the final consumer responses. Galan-Ladero et al. (2013) studied consumers' attitudes towards cause-related marketing strategies influencing consumer satisfaction and loyalty. According to Galan-Ladero et al. (2013), more favorable initial attitudes towards cause-related marketing campaigns in general lead to higher satisfaction levels after the purchase. Customers who have more positive attitudes towards cause-related marketing may experience more intrinsic benefits from supporting a cause through cause-related marketing campaigns. Intrinsic benefits are experienced by individuals who have care for supporting a charity and have prosocial and solidary core values. Such characteristics are more common for individuals who have positive attitudes towards cause-related marketing than for those with less positive attitudes. (Galan-Ladero et al. 2013.)

In addition, greater post-purchase satisfaction leads to higher levels of brand loyalty thus leading to more positive outcomes for cause-related marketing campaigns (Galan-Ladero et al. 2013). Loyal behavior towards the brand includes for example repeated purchases and word-of-mouth communication. Galan-Ladero et al. (2013) also highlights the importance of company credibility and commitment to the cause on consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, company credibility influences consumers' perceptions of the company



motivations regarding the cause-related marketing campaign thus impacting consumer attitudes and loyalty.

### **2.5. Company-cause fit in cause-related marketing**

The impacts of the fit between the cause and the company have been widely discussed in prior research. Firms may optimize their cause-related marketing campaigns by choosing a cause that fits well with the company values (Chang & Liu, 2012; Pracejus & Olsen, 2004). However, also contradicting results have been discussed in prior literature (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2013). The effects of the fit have been found to be influenced by the consumers' perceptions of the company motives (Barone et al. 2007). Cause fit may also impact the effectiveness of different donation types (Chang et al. 2018), the consumers level of skepticism (Elving, 2013).

Chang & Liu (2012) suggest that cause-related marketing can be optimized by choosing the right cause. Firstly, they identify two different types of high cause fit. Moreover, a consistent fit means that the cause and the company both consistently share similar values. On the other hand, a complementary fit means that the cause compensates for the harmful image if the company thereby making it a good fit. (Chang & Liu, 2012.)

Chang & Liu (2012) also suggest that a high fit between the cause and the company brand is more effective than lower fit. Similarly, Pracejus & Olsen (2004) claim that high fit campaigns result in better donations. However, Nan & Heo (2007) propose that the fit between the cause and the brand matter only when the consumer is brand conscious.

Not all studies about cause fit share similar results. For example, Moosmayer & Fuljahn (2013) found out that campaigns are evaluated more positively when the cause fit is low. Furthermore, altruistic motivations of the company led to more positive attitudes regardless of the cause fit and price is the most meaningful component in terms of purchase decisions.

Chang et al. (2018) claim that the cause-fit may also have an impact on the effectiveness of different donation types. Furthermore, when the cause-fit is high non-monetary donations lead to more positive consumer attitudes and higher purchasing intentions than monetary donations. However, with low cause fit the impact is the opposite. In addition, when the

cause fit is low, non-monetary donations are more effective in promoting utilitarian products and monetary donations are more effective in promoting hedonic products. This may be because monetary donations are considered being utilitarian since they are practical for the beneficiary hence creating a more holistic experience for the consumer when paired with hedonic products. The research also concludes that when the company motives are perceived as altruistic, they lead to more positive attitudes. (Chang et al. 2018.)

According to Barone et al. (2007), the effects of the cause-fit are moderated by the consumers' perceptions of the companies' motives behind the campaigns and the consumers' affinity to the cause. Also Elving (2013) suggests that consumers show lower levels of skepticism when the cause-fit is high, and the company is known to have a good reputation. A bad reputation leads to negative attitudes towards the company's organizational activities thus leading into higher levels of skepticism. Furthermore, the skeptical responses are influenced by the consumers' perceptions of the underlying motives of the company. (Elving, 2013.) In contrast, Gupta & Pirsch (2006) suggest that the motives of the company are irrelevant in terms of the purchase decisions when assessing the impact of cause-fit on the consumers' attitudes towards cause-related marketing.

Lafferty (2007) discusses how the relationship between company-cause fit and the attitude towards cause-related marketing is influenced by the corporate credibility. According to Lafferty (2007), a good company-cause fit may not be a significant factor in influencing the consumers' attitudes when compared to a poor fitting partnership between a brand and a cause and there are no significant differences with differing levels of corporate credibility. Causes generate affect which may positively influence the attitude towards the cause regardless of the company-cause fit (Lafferty, 2007).

## **2.6. Celebrity endorsements in non-profit and cause-related marketing**

In a world dominated by influencers and public figures, using celebrity endorsements in campaigns is a common strategy for promoting non-profit causes. Both companies and non-profit organizations aim at increasing consumer awareness by benefiting from the large followings of influencers and celebrities. However, the choice of the endorsement is not insignificant for the success of the campaign. Furthermore, prior research shows

relationships between celebrity credibility and the fit between the celebrity and the cause (Thamaraiselvan et al. 2017). In addition, a functional fit between the celebrity and the cause may lead to more positive attitudes towards the campaign and increase purchase intention (Branigan & Mitsis, 2014; Ilicic & Baxter, 2014).

According to Branigan & Mitsis (2014), celebrity endorsements are useful in increasing awareness when successful. However, especially NPO representatives believe that not all attention gained through celebrities is necessarily positive. Furthermore, celebrity endorsements can also cause skeptical attitudes if the consumers believe that the endorsement is used merely for marketing purposes. Thus, a genuine connection between the celebrity and the cause is an important success factor in celebrity endorsements. (Branigan & Mitsis, 2014.)

Ilicic & Baxter (2014) discuss the impacts celebrity credibility on the celebrity-cause fit and the impacts of the fit on consumer attitudes and purchase intentions. A functional fit between the celebrity and the charity cause leads to more positive attitudes towards both the charity and the celebrity. In addition, the fit also leads to higher levels of purchase intention. Thus, co-branding between celebrities and charities is more effective when the celebrity's public image aligns with the cause. (Ilicic & Baxter, 2014.)

However, Peterson et al. (2018) found out that the choice of celebrity had very little impact on the amount of donations. However, the popularity of the celebrity at the time of the donation may also influence the donation intentions and the celebrity's past may also have an impact. The overall emotions portrayed in the advertisements are more crucial in motivating the consumers to donate (Peterson et al. 2018).

According to Thamaraiselvan et al. (2017), the celebrity credibility has a significant impact on the attitude towards cause-related marketing and the consumers' purchase intentions. However, the fit between the celebrity and the cause is not significant. A celebrity with a positive public image is effective in attracting consumers to take part in cause-related marketing campaigns whereas a negative image may lead to skeptical attitudes. (Thamaraiselvan et al. 2017.)

## **2.7.Theoretical framework**

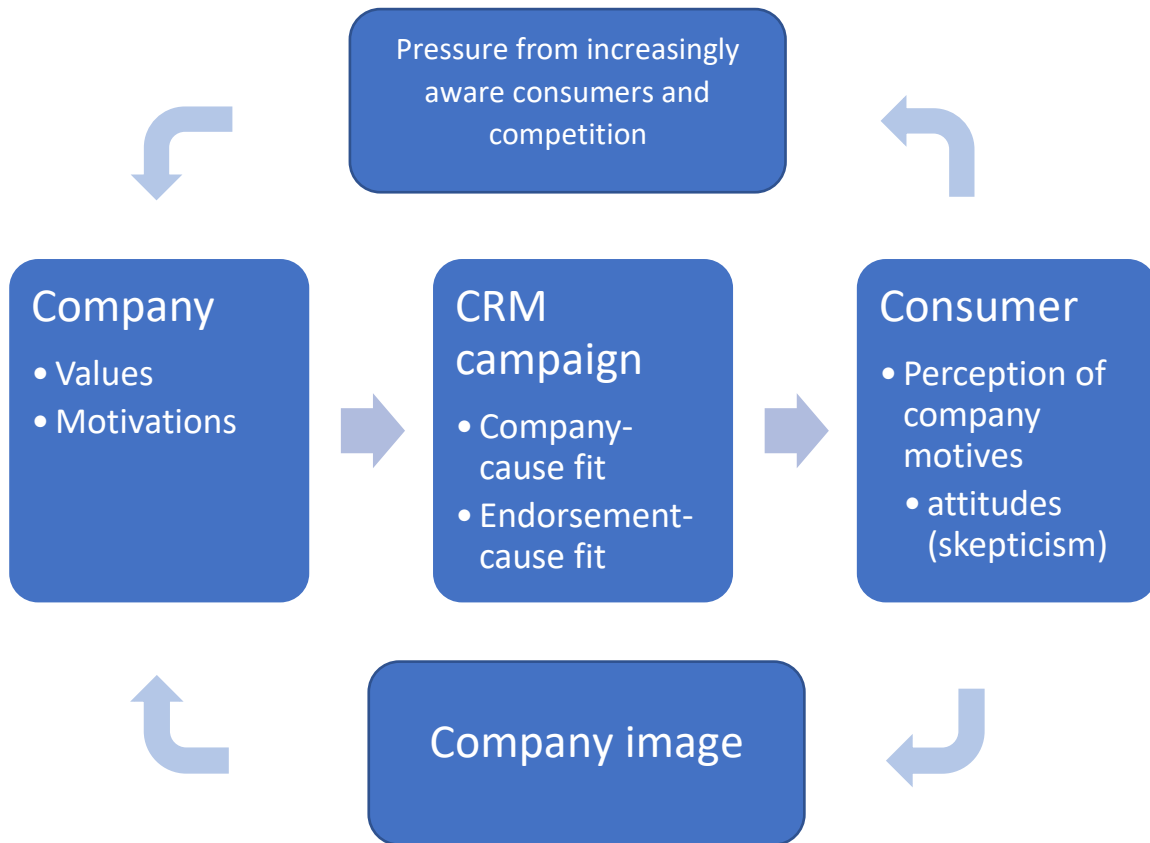
Despite the prevalent use of celebrities in cause-related marketing campaigns, there is no significant research done on the impact of company-cause fit on cause-related marketing successfulness when combined with the component of celebrity endorsements.

Addressing this research gap, this study will focus on company-cause fit and endorsement-cause fit and their impact on cause-related marketing. Firstly, the study investigates the impacts of the company-cause fit on consumers attitudes and skepticism towards cause-related marketing campaigns. Secondly, the study focuses on examining the impacts of celebrity endorsements and endorsement-cause fit on consumers' responses to cause-related marketing. Lastly, the paper will focus on discussing how companies may reduce skepticism among consumers. This will offer managerial implications for marketing professionals on how to build successful cause-related marketing campaigns in order to improve the company's image and respond to the increasingly growing demands of the consumers.

Based on the literature reviewed above a theoretical framework was composed. The framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Theoretical framework**

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The framework proposes that companies engage in corporate social responsibility strategies including cause-related marketing due to the increasing pressure from competition and socially aware consumers.

Based on current literature, one of the most critical components of a cause-related marketing campaign is the fit between the company and the cause. A good fit means that the company shares similar values with the cause it is supporting. If the company-cause fit is not aligned, the consumers may start questioning the company's motivations to engage in cause-related marketing activities. Furthermore, this may lead to skeptical attitudes towards the campaign. On the other hand, if consumers perceive that the company motives are altruistic, it reduces skepticism and generates more positive attitudes towards the campaign.

Another component influencing the success of a cause-related marketing campaign is the use of celebrity endorsements in campaign. Celebrity endorsement are often used in order to leverage the popularity of a public figure in order to create awareness for the campaign. However, a low fit between the endorsement and the cause may have negative impacts on consumer attitudes, thus resulting in more skepticism.

For the companies, the aim is to keep skepticism to a minimal level since skeptical attitudes may also deteriorate the company's image. The attitudes formed by the consumers also further increase the pressure faced by the companies. Thus, this study concentrates on three aspects of the framework. Firstly, it investigates the influence of company-cause fit on consumers level of skepticism and company image improvement. Secondly, it aims at distinguishing the role of celebrity endorsements in the success of cause-related marketing campaigns. Thirdly, to further address the issue of celebrity endorsements, it investigates the impact of endorsement-cause fit on consumer attitudes and company image.

## **2.8. Hypotheses**

In order to answer the research questions presented in the introduction of this thesis, the following hypotheses were formed for the research study.

### **2.8.1. Company-cause fit**

The prior literature has discussed the relationship between the company-cause fit and the levels of consumer skepticism and company image (Elving, 2013; Barone et al. 2007). In order to avoid confusion, in this discussion skepticism refers to a skeptical attitude rather than a personality trait.

*H1: The greater the fit between the company/brand and the cause, the lower is the level of skepticism towards the campaign.*

*H2: The greater the fit between the company/brand and the cause, the greater is the improvement in the company image.*

### **2.8.2. Celebrity endorsements and endorsement-cause fit**

The use of celebrity endorsements has also been discussed in prior research with contradicting results (Branigan & Mitsis, 2014; Peterson et al. 2018). However, based on existing literature on celebrity endorsements and cause related marketing, the following hypotheses were proposed for this study.

*H3: The use of celebrity endorsements in cause-related marketing campaigns reduces skepticism towards the campaign.*

*H4: The use of celebrity endorsements in cause-related marketing campaigns leads to company image improvement.*

In addition, the following hypotheses concerning endorsement-cause fit were proposed for the study.

*H5: Higher fit between the celebrity endorsement and the cause lead to lower levels of skepticism towards the campaign.*

*H6: Higher fit between the celebrity endorsement and the cause lead to higher levels of company image improvement.*

### **3. Data and methods**

The hypotheses of the study were tested using two hypothetical companies having cause-related marketing campaigns concerning cancer research, one being a car manufacturing company and one a company producing healthy, organic food products. Hypothetical companies were chosen for the research in order to avoid initial attitudes towards the brand impacting the study results. For the same reasons, the celebrity endorsements were not identified as any known public figures. This decision was also made due to ethical reasons since using real life examples of companies or celebrities could cause harm concerning their image in reality.

For each one of the two companies used in the survey, three different manipulations concerning the celebrity endorsement occurred, thus resulting in six different manipulations of the survey. In manipulations 1 and 2, there were no celebrity endorsements. Manipulations 3 and 4 featured celebrity endorsements with low cause fit meaning that the endorser did not have any specified connections with cancer. In manipulations 5 and 6, the celebrity endorser was disclosed having a history of going through cancer himself, thus making the endorsement-cause fit higher than in manipulations 3 and 4.

#### **3.1. Data Collection**

The data was collected through a self-administrated online survey between December 14<sup>th</sup> and December 31<sup>st</sup> in 2018. The population of the study is Finnish students at institutions of higher education. Therefore, the survey was conducted in Finnish to ensure that the participants fully understand the questions and in order to lower the barrier to respond.

Convenience sampling method was used due to time and cost efficiency of the method. The link to the online survey was distributed through social media. Altogether 245 responses were collected in total. The demographics of the sample will be discussed later in this thesis.



### **3.2. Survey design**

Since there are no prior studies made on the impact of celebrity-cause fit on the skepticism and company image, a new research design was formed in order to test the hypotheses. However, the questionnaire items for skepticism, attitude toward cause and company image improvement were inspired by items used in prior studies by Bae (2018), Howie et al. (2018), Koschate-Fischer et al. (2012) and Moosmayer & Fuljahn (2010) and modified to fit the purpose of this study. In addition to the measures adapted from prior studies, new measures for cause fit and company industry responsibility were created for the study in order to test the hypotheses.

The survey consists of two parts. In the first section, the participants answer questions regarding their demographics (age, gender, education level and income). (See Appendix 1) The second part of the survey introduced the cause-related marketing campaign with one of the six manipulations. (See Appendix 2) The addition to a short description of the campaign, the introduction included marketing visuals featuring the lavender ribbon which is the universal symbol for cancer awareness. (See Appendix 3)

After the introduction, the participants were asked to rate 11 items on a likert scale regarding their attitudes towards the cause, the company and its campaign and the perceived fit between the cause and the company. (See Appendix 3) The next subchapter will describe these items in more detail.

### **3.3. Likert scale measures**

In order to answer the research questions and test the proposed hypotheses, the following constructs need to be measured: attitude towards cause, perceived cause fit, skepticism towards the campaign, perceived image improvement of the company and the perceived industry responsibility of the increasing number of cancers.

### **3.3.1. Attitude towards the cause**

The attitude towards the cause was measured with a likert scale item “In my opinion, supporting cancer research is an important cause.” adapted from Koschate-Fischer et al. (2012). The item was measured on a five-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5).

### **3.3.2. Cause fit**

The perceived cause fit was measured with four different likert scale items: “In my opinion, the campaign fits well with the company image.”, “It is easy for me to understand why this company wants to support cancer research.”, “Supporting cancer research fits well with the company values.” and “It is clear for me why the non-profit organization has chosen to co-operate with this company.”.

These four items measured the respondent’s perception of the fit between the company brand and the cause i.e. supporting cancer research and were used as a manipulation check for cause fit. Each item was measured on a five-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5).

### **3.3.3. Skepticism towards the campaign**

In this thesis, skepticism is not treated a personality trait but rather as an attitude towards the campaign influenced by other factors such as the perceived fit between the company and the cause. Skepticism towards the cause related marketing campaign was measured with four different likert scale items adapted from Bae (2018), Howie (2018) and Moosmayer & Fuljahn (2010). Two of these items measured skepticism towards the motivation of the campaign, the latter one being reverse coded: “The company is only taking part in the campaign to help its own business.” and “The motivation behind the campaign is to support an important cause.”. One of the reverse coded items measured skepticism towards the reliability of the campaign: “I’m confident that the donations will be used to support cancer research.”. Finally, one item measured skepticism towards the campaign’s impacts on the

cause: “I believe that the campaign has no significant impact on the cause it’s supporting.”. Each item was measured on a five-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5).

#### **3.3.4. Company image improvement**

The perceived improvement of the company image due to the cause related marketing campaign was measured with the likert scale item “The campaign improves my overall image of the company.”. Each item was measured on a five-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5).

#### **3.3.5. Industry responsibility**

In addition to the company-cause fit, it was also measured to what extent the participant perceived that the company’s industry was responsible for the growing number of cancers in order to further investigate how the consumers feel about the combination of the industry and the cause it is supposedly supporting through the campaign. For the manipulations concerning car manufacturing, this item was “Car manufacturing has a role in the growing number of cancers.”. For the manipulations concerning organic food industry, this item was “Diet has a role in the growing number of cancers.” Each item was measured on a five-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5).

### **3.4. Research data**

The data collection resulted in 245 responses to the online survey. These responses were distributed into the six different manipulations. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample used.

**TABLE 1**  
**The demographic characteristics of the sample**

Demographic variable		N of respondents	% of respondents
Age	18-24	190	77,55
	25-29	42	17,14
	30-34	8	3,27
	35-39	2	0,82
	40-44	2	0,82
	45-49	1	0,41
Gender	Male	48	19,59
	Female	197	80,41
Education	Undergraduate	174	71,04
	Graduate	70	28,57
	Doctoral		
	Studies	1	0,41
Income level	Under 500 euros	51	20,82
	500-999 euros	119	48,57
	1 000-1 499 euros	35	14,29
	1 500-1 999 euros	7	2,86
	2 000-2 499 euros	12	4,90
	2 500-2 999 euros	8	3,27
	3 000-4 999 euros	13	5,31
	5 000-7 499 euros	0	0
	7 500-9 999 euros	0	0
	Over 10 000 euros	0	0
		0	0
		0	0
		0	0
		0	0
		0	0
Total		245	100

As can be seen from Table 1, a vast majority of the respondents were female undergraduates aged 18-24. This has to be taken into account when discussing the generalizability of the results to a larger population.

### **3.5. Statistical analysis methods**

The following subsection introduces the statistical analysis methods used in this study in order to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions.

#### **3.5.1. Descriptive statistics**

Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the impact of the different cause fit and celebrity endorsement manipulations on the respondents' skepticism towards the cause-related marketing campaign and the company image improvement. The purpose of the descriptive statistics is to describe the basic features of the data and summarize information about the variables in the dataset. This gives some insight to the data before analyzing it in more detail.

#### **3.5.2. Two-Way ANCOVA**

When comparing the means of two different conditions, a simple t-test can be used. However, since the research setting involves six conditions, other methods must be considered, since multiple conditions require more than one t-test which would increase the risk of Type 1 error in the analysis (Rutherford, 2001).

The analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was chosen as a suitable analysis for this study because it combines the advantages of analysis of variance (ANOVA) and regression analysis. Two-way ANCOVA is an extension to the two-way ANOVA which incorporates covariates. Therefore, two-way ANCOVA is more suitable for this study than ANOVA since it provides extra statistical control. Furthermore, ANCOVA makes it possible to control potential confounding variables that could have an impact on the results of the analysis. Two-way ANCOVA can be used to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in the adjusted means of two or more unrelated groups.

In this study, the univariate analysis of two-way ANCOVA was used to discover the relationship between the company-cause fit and the level of skepticism towards the cause-related campaign. First, composite variables were formed from the four items measuring company-cause fit and four items measuring skepticism towards the campaign.

In this study, these groups are the six different manipulations of company-cause fit and endorsement-cause fit. Demographic variables, attitude towards the cause and industry responsibility are treated as covariates in the analysis.

First, skepticism was selected as the dependent variable and factors were the different manipulations of the company-cause fit (low/high) and the endorsement-cause fit (none/low/high). In addition, industry responsibility, attitude towards the cause and demographic variables were included as covariates in the analysis. The same univariate analysis was also conducted with company image improvement as the dependent variable.

### **3.5.3. Trustworthiness of the study**

In this study, the trustworthiness of the study is evaluated from three different approaches; validity, reliability and generalizability. These are three key concepts in quantitative methods concerning the trustworthiness of the study (Muijs, 2004). In addition to these aspects of research trustworthiness, this subchapter will also discuss some ethical issues concerning the study.

#### *Validity*

Validity is concerned with whether the study is measuring what it is supposed to (Muijs, 2004). Since consumer attitudes or company image are “latent variables” that cannot be measured directly, this study required creating a measurement instrument in order to find answers to the research questions. Furthermore, content validity refers to the extent to which the variables (i.e. survey items) of the research design measure these latent variables (Muijs, 2004). In this study, the measurement instrument was created by reviewing prior research done on the issue and by comparing and combining the research designs used before. Moreover, an extensive review of prior literature helps ensuring the content validity of the study (Muijs, 2004).

Another important aspect of validity is face validity which refers to the extent to which the participants perceive the measurement instrument valid (Muijs, 2004). In order to improve the face validity of the study, the survey was pre-tested with participants representing the target population of the study. The pre-test participants were asked to evaluate the clarity

and intelligibility of the survey design and adjustments were done based on their evaluations. In addition, the validity of the company-cause fit manipulation of the research design was ensured by conducting a manipulation check before moving on to the analysis of the data.

### *Reliability*

Reliability refers to the extent to which the research is free of measurement error. Furthermore, reliability concentrates on unsystematic or random errors that may impact the results of the study (Muijis, 2004).

A study using people as participants is always prone to human errors. For example, the participants may interpret the wording of the questions wrong. As discussed above, the survey of this study was pre-tested which has helped reducing the chance of random errors in reliability. However, random errors may occur also if the participants do not read the questions properly or give false answers on purpose. This is something that is fairly difficult for the researcher to be controlled.

The reliability of the research design was also improved by measuring the same construct with more than one item. When multiple items are used to measure one variable, individual errors on one item are cancelled out by the other items measuring the same construct (Muijs, 2004). In this study, four items were used to measure both perceived company-cause fit and skepticism towards the campaign.

### *Generalizability*

Because it is usually impossible to study to whole target population, researchers use samples in order to make generalization of the population. Generalizability refers to the extent to which the findings from the sample can be generalized to a larger population. (Muijs, 2014)

This study used convenience sampling as a sampling method because it is both time and cost efficient. However, convenience sampling may lead to selection bias (Acharia et al. 2013). Furthermore, the survey of this study was distributed in the researcher's own social media network. This may lead to selection bias if the participants share certain traits due to the network proximity with the researcher. As discussed above, a vast majority of the respondents were female undergraduates aged 18-24. Thus, it seems that the sample might be biased towards a certain demographic. Consequently, the sample might be too homogenous in nature and not representative of the whole target population of the study.

Therefore, the demographics of the sample must be taken into account when discussing the findings of the study.

#### *Ethical issues in research*

For research to be ethically acceptable and reliable, it must be carried out according to the responsible conduct of research. This means that it follows the ethical guidelines endorsed by the research community. (TENK, 2012)

The guidelines for responsible conduct of research were followed throughout this study. Participating in the study was voluntary for the participants and the responses were given anonymously. Before participating, the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study.

In addition, the research setting was designed so that it will not have detrimental impacts on the public image on any real-life company or celebrity. Furthermore, the survey was based on hypothetical companies and public figures in order to study the issue of company-cause fit and endorsement-cause fit in cause-related marketing campaigns.



## **4. Results and hypothesis testing**

In this subsection I will present the results of the univariate analysis of two-way ANCOVA. Firstly, the hypotheses proposed for the study will be revised in order to evaluate the results and the accuracy of the hypotheses.

H1 predicted that a high fit between the company and cause will lead to lower levels of skepticism. In a similar manner, H2 predicted that a high fit between the company and cause will lead to higher levels of company image improvement.

H3 predicted that using celebrity endorsements in cause-related marketing campaigns reduces skepticism towards the campaign. H4 predicted that the use of celebrity endorsements in cause-related marketing leads to higher levels of company image improvement.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 further projected the influence of the endorsement-cause fit on consumers attitudes. Furthermore, H5 predicted that a high fit between the celebrity endorsement and the cause will lead to lower levels of skepticism towards the campaign. H6 predicted that a high fit between the celebrity endorsement and the cause lead to higher levels of company image improvement.

### **4.1. Cause fit manipulation check**

Firstly, the manipulation check for company-cause fit was conducted with regression analysis by comparing the different manipulation in terms of their levels of perceived cause fit. This was conducted in order to ensure that the manipulation of company-cause fit has the influence on perceived cause fit which has been assumed in the survey design. The results of the manipulation check regression analysis are presented in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2

The results of the manipulation check regression analysis

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	2,844	,106		,000
	High cause fit/no endorsement	1,168	,156	,492	,000
	Low cause fit/low endorsement fit	,093	,159	,038	,560
	High cause fit/low endorsement fit	,888	,152	,388	,000
	Low cause fit/high endorsement fit	,018	,155	,008	,907
	High cause fit/high endorsement fit	1,078	,153	,467	,000

a. Dependent Variable: Cause fit (mean)

Manipulation 1 i.e. Low cause fit/no endorsement was the excluded variable in the analysis. As can be seen from Table 2, the differences in the perceived cause fit are significant between manipulation 1 and those manipulations with high cause fit ( $p=0,000$ ). Furthermore, the differences in the perceived cause fit were not significant between manipulation 1 and those manipulations with low cause fit ( $p=0,560$ ) and ( $p=0,907$ ). Thus, the manipulations of company-cause fit in the research design have been successful and are suitable for the purpose of the study.

#### 4.2. Level of skepticism

Hypotheses 1, 3 and 5 were tested simultaneously using two-way ANCOVA with the level of skepticism as the dependent variable. The results of the analysis are presented in the following subchapters.

#### 4.2.1. Descriptive statistics

The following Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and number of participants) on the level of skepticism (dependent variables) for the different manipulations.

**TABLE 3**  
**Descriptive statistics on the level of skepticism**

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>				
Dependent Variable: Skepticism (mean)				
Endorsement	Cause fit	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Low endorsement fit	Low company cause fit	2,9306	,76441	36
	High company cause fit	2,7151	,68483	43
	Total	2,8133	,72553	79
No endorsement	Low company cause fit	2,9722	,68925	45
	High company cause fit	2,6346	,73190	39
	Total	2,8155	,72511	84
High endorsement fit	Low company cause fit	2,9563	,64522	40
	High company cause fit	2,2917	,72397	42
	Total	2,6159	,75991	82
Total	Low company cause fit	2,9545	,69297	121
	High company cause fit	2,5464	,73139	124
	Total	2,7480	,74003	245

As can be seen from Table 3, the means for the levels of skepticism are higher in those manipulations that have low company-cause fits. In addition, the mean for the level of skepticism is lower when the fit between the celebrity endorsement and the cause is high, but only when the company-cause fit is also high. In the low company-cause fit condition,

low endorsement fit leads to lower levels of skepticism than no endorsement or high endorsement fit.

#### 4.2.2. Two-Way ANCOVA

A two-way ANCOVA was conducted to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between manipulations of company-cause fit and endorsement cause-fit on the level of consumers' skepticism by controlling demographic variables, perceived industry responsibility and attitude toward cause. The following Table 4 presents the results of the two-way ANCOVA.

**TABLE 4**  
**The results of the two-way ANCOVA (Skepticism)**

<b>Tests of Between-Subjects Effects</b>						
Dependent Variable: Skepticism (mean)						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	29,916 <sup>a</sup>	11	2,720	6,110	,000	,224
Intercept	32,667	1	32,667	73,393	,000	,240
RESPONSIBILITY	,212	1	,212	,477	,491	,002
ATTITUDE TOWARD CAUSE	9,156	1	9,156	20,571	,000	,081
AGE	,449	1	,449	1,008	,316	,004
GENDER	3,733	1	3,733	8,388	,004	,035
EDUCATION	4,416	1	4,416	9,921	,002	,041
INCOME	,040	1	,040	,089	,766	,000
ENDORSEMENT	1,316	2	,658	1,479	,230	,013
CAUSE FIT	9,989	1	9,989	22,443	,000	,088
ENDORSEMENT * CAUSE FIT	1,354	2	,677	1,521	,221	,013
Error	103,708	233	,445			
Total	1983,688	245				
Corrected Total	133,624	244				

a. R Squared = ,224 (Adjusted R Squared = ,187)

As can be seen from Table 4, there is a significant effect of cause fit on the level of skepticism  $F(1,233)=22,443$  ( $p=0,000$ ). However, the differences in the means of the skepticism are not significant for different manipulations of celebrity endorsement  $F(2,233)=1,479$  ( $p=0,230$ ). In addition, the effect of the variable interaction endorsement \* cause fit is not significant  $F(2,233)=1,521$  ( $p=0,221$ ). The results are not significant since the p-values for endorsement manipulation and endorsement \* cause fit interaction are higher than 0,05. Thus, based on the descriptive statistics and the two-way ANCOVA, the endorsement-cause fit results show a non-significant trend in the predicted direction when the company-cause fit high. When company-cause fit is low, the endorsement-cause fit results show a non-significant trend in an unpredicted direction. Hence, H3 and H5 are not supported by the results of the study.

Table 5 presents the results of the post-hoc pairwise comparison in order to further investigate the impact of company-cause fit on skepticism.

**TABLE 5**  
**The post-hoc pairwise comparison (Skepticism)**

<b>Pairwise Comparisons</b>						
Dependent Variable: Skepticism (mean)						
(I) Cause fit	(J) Cause fit	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>b</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>b</sup>	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Low company cause fit	High company cause fit	,445*	,094	,000	,260	,630
High company cause fit	Low company cause fit	-,445*	,094	,000	-,630	-,260

Based on estimated marginal means

\*. The mean difference is significant at the ,05 level.

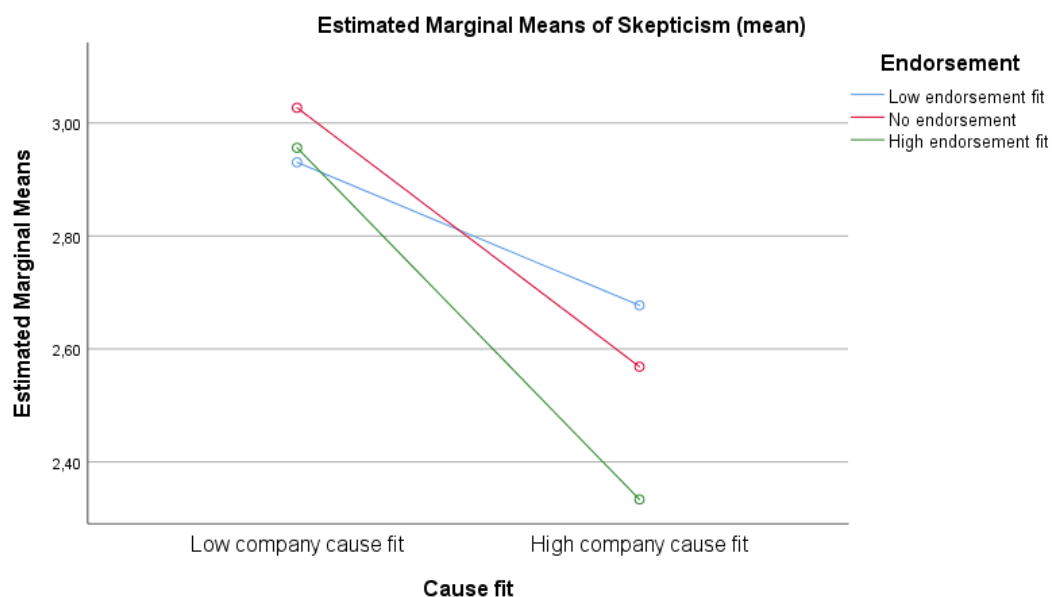
b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

The post-hoc pairwise comparison in Table 5 further reveals that the mean difference between the manipulations of company-cause fit is 0,445 i.e. the level of skepticism was on average 0,445 higher for the manipulations with low company-cause fit. Thus, the level of skepticism is significantly lower when the company-cause fit is high. H1 is therefore supported by the results of the analysis since the p-value skepticism is lower than 0,05.

Figure 2 presents the estimated marginal means of skepticism for different manipulations of company cause-fit and endorsement-cause fit. As can be seen from Figure 2, the results of the study suggest that the level of the consumers' skepticism is affected by the company-cause fit; a higher company-cause fit leads to lower levels of skepticism. However, according to the findings, skepticism is not further significantly influenced by the use of celebrity endorsements or the endorsement-cause fit.

**FIGURE 2**

**Estimate marginal means of skepticism**



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Industry responsibility (mean) = 3,4163, Attitude towards cause (mean) = 4,7306, Age = 2,31, Gender = 1,80, Education level = 4,29, Income level = 2,53

### 4.3. Company image improvement

Hypotheses 2, 4 and 6 were tested simultaneously using two-way ANCOVA with the level of company image improvement as the dependent variable.

#### 4.3.1. Descriptive statistics

The following Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and number of participants) on the level of company image improvement (dependent variables) for the different manipulations.

**TABLE 6**  
**The descriptive statistics on the level of company image improvement**

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>				
Dependent Variable: Company image improvement (mean)				
Endorsement	Cause fit	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Low endorsement fit	Low company cause fit	3,4722	,90982	36
	High company cause fit	3,7674	,78185	43
	Total	3,6329	,85000	79
No endorsement	Low company cause fit	3,4667	1,01354	45
	High company cause fit	3,7179	,99865	39
	Total	3,5833	1,00850	84
High endorsement fit	Low company cause fit	3,3750	,95239	40
	High company cause fit	3,9048	,69175	42
	Total	3,6463	,86598	82
Total	Low company cause fit	3,4380	,95649	121
	High company cause fit	3,7984	,82620	124
	Total	3,6204	,90919	245

As can be seen from the Table 6, the means for the levels of company image improvement are lower in those manipulations that have low company-cause fits. In addition, the mean for

the level of company image improvement is higher when the fit between the celebrity endorsement and the cause is high, but only when the company-cause fit also high. In the low company-cause fit condition, low endorsement fit leads to higher levels of company image improvement than no endorsement or high endorsement fit. Surprisingly, when paired with low company-cause fit, the high endorsement fit resulted in even lower image improvement scores than the condition with no endorsement.

#### **4.3.2. Two-Way ANCOVA**

A two-way ANCOVA was conducted to determine a statistically significant difference between manipulations of company-cause fit and endorsement-cause fit on the level of company image improvement by controlling demographic variables, perceived industry responsibility and attitude toward cause. The following Table 7 presents the results of the two-way ANCOVA.



TABLE 7

The results of the two-way ANCOVA (Company image improvement)

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: Company image improvement (mean)						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	23,433 <sup>a</sup>	11	2,130	2,784	,002	,116
Intercept	6,283	1	6,283	8,212	,005	,034
RESPONSIBILITY	,335	1	,335	,437	,509	,002
ATTITUDE TOWARD CAUSE	9,684	1	9,684	12,657	,000	,052
AGE	3,263	1	3,263	4,265	,040	,018
GENDER	1,859	1	1,859	2,430	,120	,010
EDUCATION	,690	1	,690	,902	,343	,004
INCOME	,001	1	,001	,001	,976	,000
ENDORSEMENT	,051	2	,025	,033	,968	,000
CAUSE FIT	7,267	1	7,267	9,498	,002	,039
ENDORSEMENT * CAUSE FIT	,322	2	,161	,210	,811	,002
Error	178,265	233	,765			
Total	3413,000	245				
Corrected Total	201,698	244				

a. R Squared = ,116 (Adjusted R Squared = ,074)

As can be seen from the table, there was a significant difference in the mean level of company image improvement between the different manipulations of cause fit  $F(1,233)=9,498$  ( $p=0,002$ ). However, the differences in the mean level of company image improvement are not significant for the different manipulations of celebrity endorsement  $F(2,233)=0,033$  ( $p=0,968$ ). In addition, the effect of the variable interaction endorsement \* cause fit is not significant  $F(2,233)=0,210$  ( $p=0,811$ ). The results are not significant since the p-values for endorsement manipulation and endorsement \* cause fit interaction are higher than 0,05. Thus, based on the descriptive statistics and the two-way ANCOVA, the endorsement-cause fit results show a non-significant trend in the predicted direction when the company-cause fit high. When company-cause fit is low, the endorsement-cause fit

results show a non-significant trend in an unpredicted direction. Hence, H4 and H6 are not supported by the results of the study.

Table 8 presents the results of the post-hoc pairwise comparison in order to further investigate the impact of company-cause fit on company image.

**TABLE 8**  
**The post-hoc pairwise comparison (Company image improvement)**

<b>Pairwise Comparisons</b>						
Dependent Variable: Company image improvement (mean)						
(I) Cause fit	(J) Cause fit	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. <sup>b</sup>	95% Confidence Interval for Difference <sup>b</sup>	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Low company cause fit	High company cause fit	-,379 <sup>*</sup>	,123	,002	-,622	-,137
High company cause fit	Low company cause fit	,379 <sup>*</sup>	,123	,002	,137	,622

Based on estimated marginal means

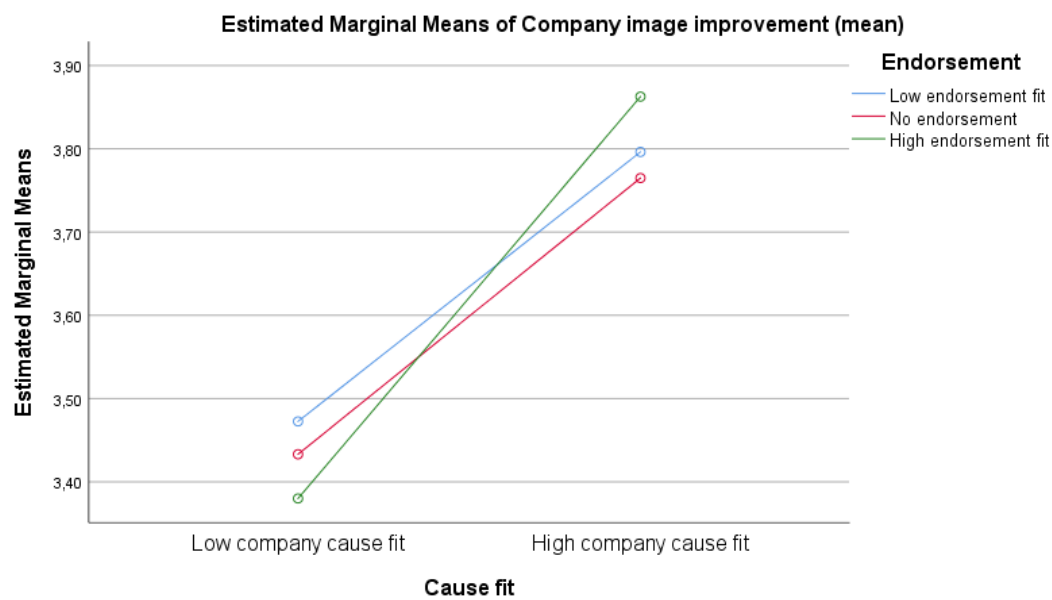
\*. The mean difference is significant at the ,05 level.

b. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni.

The post-hoc pairwise comparison in Table 8 further reveals that the mean difference between the manipulations of cause fit is 0,379 i.e. the company image improvement was on average 0,379 higher for the manipulations with high company-cause fit. Thus, the level of company image improvement is significantly higher when the company-cause fit high. H2 is therefore supported by the results of the analysis since the p-value skepticism is lower than 0,05.

Figure 3 presents the estimated marginal means of skepticism for different manipulations of company cause-fit and endorsement-cause fit. As can be seen from figure 3, the results of the study suggest that the level of company image improvement is affected by the company-cause fit but is not further influenced by celebrity endorsement or the endorsement-cause fit.

**FIGURE 3**  
**Estimated marginal means of company image improvement**



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Industry responsibility (mean) = 3.4163, Attitude towards cause (mean) = 4.7306, Age = 2.31, Gender = 1.80, Education level = 4.29, Income level = 2.53

## **5. Discussion and managerial implications**

In this chapter, the key findings of this research will be discussed and reflected with regards to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. In addition, practical implications of the findings for companies and marketing professionals will be presented.

### **5.1. The impact of company-cause fit**

This study has focused on evaluating the consumers' attitudes towards a cause-related marketing campaign supporting cancer research. Firstly, the study addressed the impact of company-cause fit on consumers attitudes. In the research setting, cancer research was paired up with either a car manufacturer (low fit) or a company producing healthy, organic food products (high fit).

As discussed in the results section, the results of the study suggest that the consumers' level of skepticism is lower when the fit between the cause and the company is high. In addition to the reduced level of skepticism, the results of the study also suggest that a high company-cause fit positively influences the consumers' perceptions of the company image. This is important since one of the biggest motivations for companies to engage in cause-related marketing is to improve their social image. (Liu & Ko, 2011)

The findings are in line with the previous studies claiming that consumers are less skeptical towards cause-related marketing and the motivations of the companies to engage in such activities when the company-cause fit is high (Barone et al. 2007; Elving, 2013). Furthermore, skepticism is often influenced by the consumers' perceptions of the companies' underlying motivations. A good company-cause fit may improve these perceptions. (Elving, 2013.) Furthermore, the cause fit has an impact on consumers' perception of the companies' motivation to support the cause thus reducing skeptical attitudes towards the cause-related marketing initiative (Barone et al. 2007).

It is good to note that Chang & Liu (2012) identify two types of high company cause-fit: consistent fit and complementary fit. It could be argued that cancer research and car manufacturing form a complementary fit since pollution is one of the leading causes for

cancer. Thus, supporting cancer research would compensate for the harm caused by the manufacturing. However, in this study car manufacturing was considered as a low fit for cancer research and the manipulation check also confirmed that the manipulation was successful.

In addition to the advantages distinguished by this study, prior literature has discussed additional benefits of a high company cause-fit. Furthermore, a good compatibility between the company and the cause also positively influences the employees' motivation and job satisfaction as they may find it easier to identify with the company and its values (Drumwright, 1996). Pracejus & Olsen (2004) also suggest that a good company-cause fit could have positive impacts on customer loyalty thus creating long-term benefits to the company. Thus, a good implementation of a cause-related marketing campaign may have both internal and external benefits for the company.

However, not all prior studies agree with these findings. For example, Lafferty (2007) claims that company-cause fit does not have significant influences on consumers' attitudes. Furthermore, emotions raised by the campaign are more important in terms of consumer attitudes. Lafferty (2007) suggests that these emotions are raised by the cause itself regardless of the company-cause fit. The role of emotional arousal was also discussed by Guerreiro et al. (2015) who claim that consumers' make altruistic decisions based on unconscious drivers caused by emotional cues.

Also Moosmayer & Fuljahn (2013) question the role of company-cause fit in the successfulness of cause-related marketing after finding out that campaigns with low company-cause fit were in fact evaluated more positively than campaigns with high fit. However, Moosmayer & Fuljahn (2013) also highlight the importance of consumers' perceptions of company motives. Furthermore, altruistic motives supposedly lead to positive attitudes regardless of the cause fit (Moosmayer & Fuljahn, 2013).

Nonetheless, it is safe to say company-cause fit is not the only important campaign-related factor to consider when creating effective cause-related marketing campaigns. Furthermore, consumers may also evaluate the cause-related marketing campaign through different

attributes. For example, Vanhamme et al. (2012) discussed how consumers identify with the cause through cause type, scope and acuteness. Therefore, it is important for the companies to carefully assess the nature of their target market in order to distinguish the most suitable cause for the campaign.

## **5.2. Endorsement-cause fit**

In addition to company-cause fit, this study also addressed the use of celebrity endorsements in cause-related marketing campaigns. The results show that a high endorsement-cause fit leads to lower levels of skepticism and a better company image than no endorsement or a low fit endorsement. However, this only holds true when the company-cause fit also high. In the low company-cause fit condition, low endorsement fit performed better in terms of both skepticism and company image. Nevertheless, the differences between the manipulations were not significant. Consequently, the hypotheses concerning celebrity endorsements (H3-H6) were not supported.

This finding aligns with the previous study by Thamaraiselvan et al. (2017) who claim the celebrity-cause fit is not significant when assessing the effectiveness of the campaign and the consumer attitudes. In their study, Thamaraiselvan et al. (2017) suggest that the credibility of the celebrity is much more important in terms of the successfulness campaign. However, this study did not consider the credibility component of the endorsements since the real identities of the celebrities were not disclosed to the participants. Thus, it is difficult to say whether celebrity credibility has a role in the success based on this study.

Also Peterson et al. (2018) suggested that the choice of celebrity has only little impact on the consumers' willingness to participate even when one of the celebrities had a scandalous background. While their research did not directly concern celebrity-cause fit, it still offers insight on the significance of the choice of celebrity endorsements in cause-related marketing. Furthermore, Peterson et al. (2018) claim that the emotions evoked by the cause are much more meaningful. Thus companies should concentrate on the overall emotional appeal of their cause-related marketing campaigns.

However, not all research done on celebrity endorsements in cause-related marketing agree with these findings. The results of this study contradict with Branigan & Mitsis (2014) and Ilicit & Baxter (2014) who claim that an authentic fit between the cause and the celebrity is important in terms of the credibility of the campaign and consumer attitudes. Furthermore, Branigan & Mitsis (2014) suggest that a good fit between the celebrity and the cause is important especially for the non-profit organizations. A good celebrity-cause fit leads to more positive perceptions of the credibility of the cause and the campaign. Especially Generation Y (i.e. millennials) may be skeptical towards non-profit causes because their generation has been exposed to different forms of marketing communications for many years.

However, Ilicit & Baxter (2014) also mention that a low fit between the celebrity and the cause does not necessarily result in negative orientations toward the campaign as consumers tend to maintain neutral attitudes. This is more in line with the results of this study, as the high endorsement-fit campaign performed better in terms of skepticism and image improvement, but the difference was not significant.

Even though the differences concerning endorsement-cause fit were not significant, the results still show some interesting trends that may be further discussed. Despite the insignificant results, it still seems that the endorsement-cause fit might have some impacts on the consumers' attitudes and the successfulness of the campaign. Furthermore, the influence of company-cause fit may be different depending on the endorsement. The results imply that the impact of company-cause fit on skepticism and company image is bigger for high fit endorsements, thus optimizing the positive impact of cause fit on the success of the campaign. The differences between different endorsements were not significant in this study but the issue is still worth considering when creating cause-related marketing campaigns.

### **5.3. Factors influencing skepticism**

Although this study has shown that consumers' skepticism is influenced by the company-cause fit of the cause-related marketing campaign, the respondents showed signs of skepticism in all of the manipulations of the research setting. Thus, it is important to the

discuss the potential underlying drivers for these skeptical attitudes. According to Langen et al. (2013), younger and more educated consumers tend to be more skeptical towards cause-related marketing than their older and less educated counterparts. Educated people are generally more aware and concerned about social issues and are more likely to question companies' motivations for cause-related marketing.

The sample of this study consisted of Finnish university students who were mainly in their early twenties. Therefore, it could be that the skepticism detected in this study is higher than with people in general. In addition, Guerreiro et al. (2013) discuss that cause-related marketing becomes more effective as the income stability of the consumers increases. Since the participants of this study were all students, it can be deduced that their incomes are fairly low and unstable compared to people with permanent employment. Thus, it remains to be seen whether there are differences in the levels of skepticism between different age groups, educational backgrounds and income levels among Finnish consumers.

According to Chang & Cheng (2014), also an individualistic mindset may lead to higher levels of skepticism. Finnish people are characterized as being individualistic in terms of Hofstede's cultural dimensions which may explain some of the skepticism that appeared in the study.

All these aspects in mind, it can be concluded that cause-related marketing is a complex issue involving various inter-related factors and therefore requires cautious decision-making from both parties of the alliance.

#### **5.4. Managerial implications on company-cause fit in cause-related marketing**

While cause-related marketing strategies have become more popular in the past years, there are still challenges to be tackled in order to create efficient campaigns that benefit both the company and the NPO behind the cause and create value for the consumers. One of these challenges is how to pick the right cause in order to optimize the benefits of the campaigns. This study has offered insight to the concept of company-cause fit. Based on the findings of this study, a high company-cause fit can improve consumers attitudes' towards cause-related



marketing, reduce skepticism and enhance the company image. This finding has several implications for marketing managers. Firstly, managers need to carefully consider the values that the company is communicating to the public. Furthermore, a good fit involves a cause which shares similar values with the company or the brand. A poor company-cause fit may result in skeptical consumers and have detrimental impact on the company image.

Chang et al. (2018) suggest that cause fit is more important in campaigns that involve non-monetary donations. Although this study only focused on monetary donations, managers should consider the benefits of using different types of donations; non-monetary giving has more symbolic meaning for the consumers and makes it easier for them to understand the impact of their contribution.

In order to further reduce skepticism Bae (2018) suggests that companies need to consider both their firm-serving and consumer-serving motivations to engage in cause-related marketing. Consumers are aware that companies do not support causes just out of their good will. Millennials are skeptical and more aware of social, health and environmental issues than earlier generations of consumers. Therefore, Bae (2018) highlights the importance of transparency in cause-related marketing and CSR communications. By openly stating the firm-serving motivations, companies may improve the consumers' perceptions of corporate credibility. This credibility is also important in terms of creating loyal customers (Galan-Ladero et al. 2013). This is something that marketing managers should remember also in their post-campaign communications; disclosing the actual contributions to the cause may help building a better corporate credibility.

In addition to lower levels of skepticism and improved company image, prior research also suggests additional benefits for the high company-cause fit. Drumwright (1996) argues that company-cause fit has a positive impact on the employees' job satisfaction. When fit between the company and the cause is high, employees find it easier to identify with the company and its values. The satisfaction of the employees has positive spillover effects on their performance which has further long-term benefits for the company and its operations. Thus, managers need to keep in mind that a successful implementation of a cause-related marketing campaign may have valuable impacts on the overall performance of the company.

### **5.5. Managerial implications on endorsement-cause fit in cause-related marketing**

This study also addressed the use of celebrity endorsement in cause-related marketing. The differences in the impact of celebrity endorsements on skepticism and company image were not significant between the endorsement manipulations. However, the findings offer some trends that can be used as guidelines for managerial implications concerning celebrity endorsements in cause-related marketing.

The trend implies that a high endorsement-cause fit leads to lower levels of skepticism and a better company image than no endorsement or a low fit endorsement when the company-cause fit is high. However, low endorsement fit performed better in terms of both skepticism and company image when the company-cause fit was also low. Furthermore, the impact of company-cause fit on skepticism and company image is bigger for high fit endorsements. When the company-cause fit is low, the endorsement does not matter as much and a low endorsement fit can in fact be more effective. Thus, in order to optimize the impact of a high company-cause fit, managers should consider complementing the campaign with a high fit celebrity endorsement who has some personal connection to the cause.

## **6. Conclusions**

This chapter presents the final conclusions of the study as well as research limitations and recommendations for further research.

### **6.1. Research summary**

This thesis has discussed the topic of cause fit in cause-related marketing. Furthermore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the impacts of company-cause fit and endorsement-cause fit on consumers' attitudes towards cause-related marketing campaigns. In order to examine the role of company-cause fit in cause-related marketing, the study paired the cause of supporting cancer research with two hypothetical companies representing different industries: car manufacturing and healthy, organic food.

The research in this study was conducted through an online survey consisting of 11 likert scale items that the participants were asked to rate based on their attitudes towards the cause, the company and its campaign and the perceived fit between the cause and the company. The survey involved six different manipulations concerning the company-cause fit and endorsement-cause fit of the campaign.

The hypotheses of the study were tested using a two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). Supporting the hypotheses of the study, the results show that company-cause fit has a significant impact on skepticism towards the campaign. Furthermore, consumers' level of skepticism is lower when the fit between the cause and the company is high. In addition, the results of the study also suggest that a high company-cause fit improves the consumers' perceptions of the company image.

The study reflects the prior findings of Barone et al. (2007) and Elving (2013) who suggest that a high fit between the cause and the company reduces skepticism towards cause-related marketing and the company's motivations to engage in such activities. Thus, marketing managers should carefully consider the choice of supported cause when creating cause-related marketing campaigns. Furthermore, a good fit reflects the values of the company and communicates them to the consumers through the campaign.

However, the results contradict with the findings of Lafferty et al. (2007) who claim that company-cause fit does not have a significant impact on consumers' attitudes. Instead, the emotions raised by the campaign are more crucial in the forming of consumer attitudes (Lafferty et al. 2007). Also Moosmayer & Fuljahn (2013) have presented contradicting findings claiming that a low company-cause fit may in fact lead to better consumer attitudes than a high fit. Thus, it seems that the optimization of company-cause fit in cause-related marketing is a complex issue which requires more research in order to understand its impacts on the success of such campaigns.

In addition to company-cause fit, the study also addressed the use of celebrity endorsements in cause-related marketing. Furthermore, the study concentrated on investigating the impact of endorsement-cause fit on consumer attitudes. According to the findings, a high endorsement-cause fit results in lower levels of skepticism and a better company image when the company-cause fit is high. However, when the fit between the company and the cause is low, a low endorsement-cause fit performs better in terms of consumer attitudes and company image. Nevertheless, these differences between the manipulations of endorsement-cause fit were not significant which resulted in rejecting the hypotheses concerning celebrity endorsements.

Although prior research has shown contradicting results concerning the role of endorsement-cause fit influencing consumer attitudes (Branigan & Mitsis, 2014; Ilicit & Baxter, 2014), the results align with the findings of Thamaraiselvan et al. (2017) and who claim that the endorsement-cause fit does not have a significant impact on the effectiveness of the campaign or the consumer attitudes. Instead, the credibility of the celebrity endorsement is much more crucial (Thamaraiselvan et al. 2017). Contradicting with this claim, Peterson et al. (2018) suggest that the choice of celebrity does not significantly influence the success of the campaign. Furthermore, they claim that the overall emotional appeal of the campaign more important (Peterson et al. 2018).

This study has offered some insight on the role of company-cause fit and endorsement-cause fit cause-related marketing. In addition, the findings have several managerial implications on successful implementation of cause-related marketing campaigns. Furthermore, the study suggests that in order to improve consumers' attitudes towards cause-related marketing campaigns and enhance the company image, managers need to consider the values of the

company and choose a cause which aligns well with these values. This is important because a low company-cause fit may make the consumers question the motivations of the company to engage in cause-related marketing, thus resulting in skeptical attitudes and a lower company image. Although the influence of celebrity endorsements and endorsement-cause fit was not found significant in this study, the findings still offered a trend which can be applied for practical implications. Moreover, the trend suggests that the positive influence of a high company-cause fit can be optimized with a celebrity endorsement that has a genuine connection with the cause.

In conclusion, this study has added to the knowledge of cause-related marketing and improved the understanding of the role of company-cause fit and celebrity endorsements in cause-related marketing campaigns. In addition, it helps companies in reducing skepticism towards cause-related marketing campaigns and improving the company image. As pointed out by Liu & Ko (2011), improving the social image of the company is one of the biggest motivations for companies to engage in cause-related marketing. Therefore, this thesis offers valuable information on the potential success factors of cause-related marketing campaigns in order to optimize their effectiveness and benefits for the company.

## **6.2. Limitations of the study**

The following limitations should be taken into account concerning the findings of this study.

As discussed earlier in this thesis, the sample has demographic limitations. The study uses convenience sampling as sampling method due to time and cost restrictions. Furthermore, since the survey was distributed in the researcher's own social media network, the sample is biased towards people in the proximity of the researcher who have access to internet.

Another limitation of the sampling method is that it is difficult to estimate the response rate of the survey since it is not known how many people have seen the survey in their social media feed.

Consequently, the sampling method resulted in a sample consisting of a vast majority of Finnish female undergraduates aged 18-24. Therefore, the results of this study are not

representative of populations outside the sample, including different cultures, ages and educational backgrounds.

### **6.3. Suggestions for future research**

Cause-related marketing is becoming one of the most prominent forms of corporate social responsibility strategies. However, this thesis only touched upon few aspects of the phenomenon. In this subsection, suggestions for future research will be discussed.

Because of time constraints, this study was not able to address the long-term impacts of company-cause fit on consumer attitudes, skepticism and company image. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate whether a campaign with a high company-cause fit would have more positive impacts also in long term. Similarly, future research could address the impact of company cause-fit on brand loyalty or brand switching behavior in order to create a better understanding of the campaigns' abilities to form meaningful relationships with consumers.

The online survey in this study featured hypothetical companies and celebrities. However, it would be fascinating to replicate the study using real-life examples of companies and celebrities. Of course, for both ethical and legal reasons, this would require consent from all parties. By using real-life celebrities, it would be possible to further investigate the impact of celebrity credibility on cause-related marketing, as suggested by Thamaraiselvan et al. (2017).

Prior research has discussed the role of moral identity in cause-related marketing (He et al. 2016). In the future, also the research on company-cause fit could be approached from the moral identity of consumers. Moreover, future research could focus on distinguishing the relationship between consumers' moral self-schema and the influence of cause fit.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Online survey



Tämä kyselylomake on osa Aalto-yliopiston kauppakorkeakoulun markkinoinnin laitoksen pro gradu -tutkielmaa. Kysely on suunnattu korkeakouluopiskelijoille ja siihen vastataan anonyymisti. Vastaaminen vie aikaa arviolta 5 minuuttia.



Mihin seuraavista ikäryhmistä kuulut?

Mikä on sukupuolesi?

Mikä on koulutusasteesi? Valitse tämänhetkistä koulutustasi vastaava vaihtoehto.

Kuinka paljon saat tuloja kuukaudessa? Tuloksi lasketaan esimerkiksi palkat, oman yrityksen tuotot, eläkkeet, työttömyysturva, muut sosiaalietuudet sekä pääomatulot.



	Täysin samaa mieltä	Jokseenkin samaa mieltä	Ei samaa eikä eri mieltä	Jokseenkin eri mieltä	Täysin eri mieltä
Syöpätutkimuksen tukeminen on mielestäni tärkeä asia.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kampanja sopii mielestäni hyvin yrityksen imagoon.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Uskon, ettei kampanjalla ole merkittävää vaikutusta tukemansa kohteen hyväksi.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Motivaatio kampanjan takana on tärkeän asian tukeminen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Autoteollisuudella on rooli syöpien yleistymisessä.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Minun on helppo ymmärtää, miksi yritys haluaa tukea syöpätutkimusta.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Luotan siihen, että kampanjan lahjoitukset käytetään syöpätutkimuksen tukemiseen.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Syöpätutkimuksen tukeminen sopii hyvin yrityksen arvoihin.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Yritys on aloittanut kampanjan ainoastaan auttaakseen omaa liiketoimintaansa.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Minulle on selkeää, miksi syöpätutkimusta tukeva järjestö haluaa tehdä yhteistyötä juuri tämän yrityksen kanssa.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kampanja parantaa yrityksen kokonaisvaltaista kuvaa silmissäni.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## **Appendix 2: Manipulations**

### **Condition 1: Low cause fit, no endorsement**

Yritys X on kansainvälinen autonvalmistaja. Hiljattain yritys on päättänyt aloittaa kampanjan, jossa jokaisen myydyn auton tuotoista lahjoitetaan 5% syöpätutkimusta tukevalle järjestölle.

*Translation: Company X is an international car manufacturer. Recently these company has decided to start a campaign where 5% from the profits of every car sold are donated to a charity supporting cancer research.*

### **Condition 2: High cause fit, no endorsement**

Yritys X tuottaa terveellistä, luonnonmukaisesti valmistettua ruokaa. Hiljattain yritys on päättänyt aloittaa kampanjan, jossa jokaisen ostetun tuotteen hinnasta lahjoitetaan 5% syöpätutkimusta tukevalle järjestölle.

*Translation: Company X is a company offering healthy, organic food products. Recently these company has decided to start a campaign where 5% from the price of every product sold are donated to a charity supporting cancer research.*

### **Condition 3: Low cause fit, low endorsement fit**

Yritys X on kansainvälinen autonvalmistaja. Hiljattain yritys on päättänyt aloittaa kampanjan, jossa jokaisen myydyn auton tuotoista lahjoitetaan 5% syöpätutkimusta tukevalle järjestölle. Kampanjan keulahahmona toimii näyttelijänä tunnetuksi tullut arvostettu julkisuuden henkilö.

*Translation: Company X is an international car manufacturer. Recently these company has decided to start a campaign where 5% from the profits of every car sold are donated to a charity supporting cancer research. The campaign is endorsed by a respected celebrity widely known as an actor.*

### **Condition 4: High cause fit, low endorsement fit**

Yritys X tuottaa terveellistä, luonnonmukaisesti valmistettua ruokaa. Hiljattain yritys on päättänyt aloittaa kampanjan, jossa jokaisen ostetun tuotteen hinnasta lahjoitetaan 5%

syöpätutkimusta tukevalle järjestölle. Kampanjan keulahahmona toimii näyttelijänä tunnetuksi tullut arvostettu julkisuuden henkilö.

*Translation: Company X is a company offering healthy, organic food products. Recently these company has decided to start a campaign where 5% from the price of every product sold are donated to a charity supporting cancer research. The campaign is endorsed by a respected celebrity widely known as an actor.*

#### **Condition 5: Low cause fit, high endorsement fit**

Yritys X on kansainvälinen autonvalmistaja. Hiljattain yritys on päättänyt aloittaa kampanjan, jossa jokaisen myydyn auton tuotoista lahjoitetaan 5% syöpätutkimusta tukevalle järjestölle. Kampanjan keulahahmona toimii näyttelijänä tunnetuksi tullut arvostettu julkisuuden henkilö, joka on myös itse sairastanut syövän menneisyydessään.

*Translation: Company X is an international car manufacturer. Recently these company has decided to start a campaign where 5% from the profits of every car sold are donated to a charity supporting cancer research. The campaign is endorsed by a respected celebrity widely known as an actor who has a history of having cancer himself.*

#### **Condition 6: High cause fit, high endorsement fit**

Yritys X tuottaa terveellistä, luonnonmukaisesti valmistettua ruokaa. Hiljattain yritys on päättänyt aloittaa kampanjan, jossa jokaisen ostetun tuotteen hinnasta lahjoitetaan 5% syöpätutkimusta tukevalle järjestölle. Kampanjan keulahahmona toimii näyttelijänä tunnetuksi tullut arvostettu julkisuuden henkilö, joka on myös itse sairastanut syövän menneisyydessään.

*Translation: Company X is a company offering healthy, organic food products. Recently these company has decided to start a campaign where 5% from the price of every product sold are donated to a charity supporting cancer research. The campaign is endorsed by a respected celebrity widely known as an actor who has a history of having cancer himself.*

### Appendix 3: Campaign visuals

Note: The campaign visuals created for the survey use non-copyrighted images labeled for noncommercial reuse with modification.



*Translation: Supporting cancer research*